

UPPER PENINSULA

# Busi

August 2006 • Vol. 14 • Num

24-080106-01

**TODAY'S TOPIC:  
EDUCATION & TRAINING**

## X Apprenticeship program helps build the U.P.

MARQUETTE — Several of the Upper Peninsula building trades' apprenticeship training programs have a new home in Marquette.

Northern Michigan University's (NMU) Jacobetti Center will house students training for careers as bricklayers, ironworkers, operating engineers, plumbers and pipe fitters, and sheet-metal workers. The arrangement came about as part of an agreement between the U.P. Building and Construction Trades Council and Northern Michigan University.

The move to new housing allows the program to accommodate the growing need for skilled tradespeople.

"We expect a 40 percent growth in the skilled trades during the next several years," said Mike Thibault, the Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council (MBCTC) field representative. "This facility will help us meet the increase in demand."

The demand for skilled workers is fueled, in part, by the increasing rate of construction. Construction in America is a trillion-dollar industry, representing approximately one-third of the nation's

(See TRAINING on page 13)



# Training

(Continued from page 1)

gross national product. With advances in engineering and architectural technology, today's construction projects are larger and more complex than ever before.

To meet those needs, a force of educated, highly trained industry craftsmen and women is required; that requirement is expected to be fulfilled by hav-

*"In today's business world, many companies can't risk using unskilled labor"*

— Tony Retaskie  
U.P. Construction Council

ing a certified apprenticeship program. Depending upon the trade, the apprentice schools are in one of several locations across the U.P. — now including NMU's Jacobetti Center.

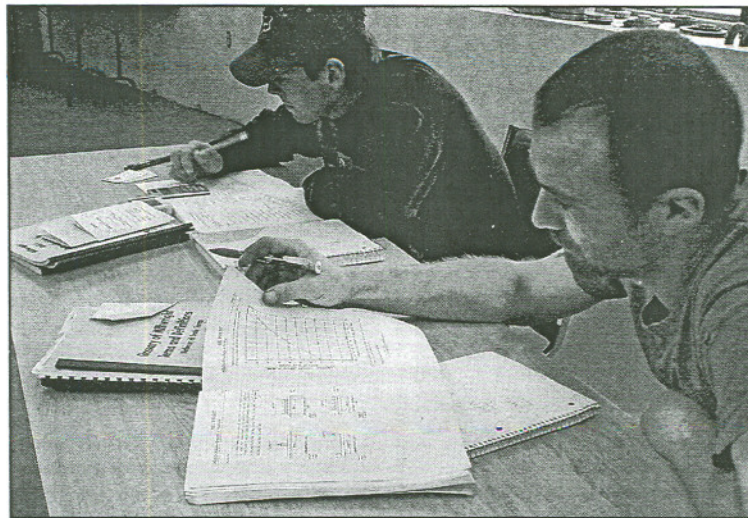
The shift towards using college campus as part of the apprenticeship learning programs is important.

"Today's trades do not carry the stigma of yesteryear," says Tony Retaskie, executive director of the Upper Peninsula Construction Council. "We have apprentice program schools on the campuses of NMU and at Bay de Noc in Escanaba, plus every graduate of the program gets a Department of Labor certificate."

With changes in technology, the high demands of having construction projects done on time, within budget and within safe environments is critical to those who are hiring our contractors. Having skilled craftsmen and women who have the education and practical experience on the job can make a positive financial impact on the project. Skimping on the quality of labor can be costly in the long run.

Given the increasing complex nature of construction projects, tradesworker education programs that are akin to collegial preparatory work is important.

"Sure, it gives students the training they need, but having the training in places like NMU and Bay college helps validate the extensive type of training that they receive," says Thibault. "In



Millwright apprentices look through their books during classroom instruction at NMU's Jacobetti Center in Marquette.

today's business world, many companies can't risk using unskilled labor - it simply costs too much when the repairs for errors or productivity losses are factored in."

For most tradesworkers training programs, experienced journeymen teach apprentices. At the Jacobetti Center, NMU instructors and trades instructors will collaborate to teach the apprentices. NMU's faculty will teach some of the fundamentals and basic skills, while apprentice instructors will teach the highly specialized skills needed in each student's trade.

Trades workers are increasingly college educated, too.

"People come to the trades from all kinds of backgrounds, says Retaskie. "In part, they come here because it's an industry where an individual can — with a bit of dedication and hard work — achieve career goals."

There also is job security in trades work — particularly that it won't be outsourced overseas, a fear that is very relevant for American factory workers and some white-collar professionals.

"The construction industry is truly different from the manufacturing industries," says Bart Carrigan, executive vice president of the Michigan Chapter of Associated General Contractors, "in that we offer a host of entrepreneurial opportunities for people at all levels."

During the apprenticeship program, most tradesworkers have on-the-job training and classroom experience. The duration of apprenticeship varies by trade, but generally is three to five years long. After successful completion of the

program, workers become full-fledged journeymen.

"One of the reasons the apprenticeship program is popular," says Retaskie, "is because students can earn wages while they are learning. Unlike college students, students in apprenticeship programs are paid for their training time."

Several requirements are needed for acceptance into the apprenticeship program. Most local chapters — regardless of the trade — require a high school diploma or equivalent, a valid driver's license, and good math skills. Many also require workers to pass mandatory drug tests and, for electricians, a vision test for color blindness is also required.

Journeymen who graduate from the program also continue to receive training throughout their careers. The UPCC conducts regular ongoing training events for workers in every unionized trade. The training sessions are customized by trade, and feature the latest information to keep trades workers up to speed on recent developments in their field.

Career advancement is also possible in the trades, particularly for those who go through apprenticeship training. Many apprenticed journeymen will become foremen or project supervisors; some also start their own companies, usually as signatory contractors.

Apprenticeship training programs are funded through private contributions, not through public taxes. For additional information, visit a local union chapter. You can find contact information for each chapter at [www.upconstruction.com](http://www.upconstruction.com), or by calling 906-786-1573.

## Northern Initiatives

Lending & Consulting Services  
For U.P. Businesses & Manufacturers

[www.niupnorth.org](http://www.niupnorth.org)

### BUSINESS LOANS

- Technical Assistance
- Community Banking Partners

### CONSULTING SERVICES

- Lean Enterprise
- Lean Office
- IT Planning & Development
- Market Research

NMU University Center • Suite 1104  
Marquette, MI 49855

906.228.5571 Toll Free 800.254.2156